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Survey finds homelessness among top three community concerns; Committee to End Homelessness reports strong progress on Ten-Year Plan

SEATTLE — Homelessness is one of the top three issues facing the residents of King County — behind transportation and education — but it *can* be resolved, says an overwhelming majority of individuals in a public opinion poll. The results of a United Way of King County-commissioned poll were released today at a joint news conference held with the Committee to End Homelessness in King County.

Also released today was *The First Bold Steps*, the first progress report on the Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County. The report announces that housing development and new funding sources for housing and services far exceed the early goals outlined in the plan.

“Our partners — governments and businesses, faith communities and philanthropists, human services and housing providers and advocates for homeless people — are figuring out the smartest ways to get the best results, and are already making a difference,” said Bill Block, project director of the Committee to End Homelessness in King County.

“The Ten-Year Plan saves lives,” said Sheila Sebron, a disabled veteran and mother who now has a stable home and is dedicated to helping others achieve the same thanks to the help of several local agencies and her own determination. “We have taken the first steps but we have a lot more work to do. I know I won’t stop until housing is available to all those who need it.”

The public opinion poll was conducted to determine current public attitudes and perceptions around homelessness. Research firm Lopez and Cheung contacted nearly 900 adults by phone in March, making sure that the households called reflect the demographic and cultural diversity of our region.

Some poll highlights (see attachment for more details) are:

- Homelessness is the third most important issue in this region, behind transportation and education.
- More than 80 percent of respondents do not believe the problem is too big to be solved and nearly 60 percent believe that — given appropriate resources — we can end homelessness.
- A significant number of respondents question whether the right actions are being taken by the right people to end homelessness. Many say government agencies are not doing enough to address the issue, and 52 percent are concerned that the problem will increase in their lifetime.
- While respondents are highly sympathetic to the issue of homelessness, the number of respondents who report taking action are very low.

“The poll tells us that King County’s residents care about homelessness and believe a solution is possible,” said Jon Fine, president and CEO of United Way of King County. Fine is also a member of the Committee to End Homelessness Governing Board. “To end homelessness, we need to build both the public and

political will, and tools like this survey inform our efforts by giving us the data and information we need to establish benchmarks and identify the best opportunities and investments for the future.”

““The First Bold Steps report shows that we are already working aggressively to end homelessness,” said Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels, also a member of the committee's governing board. “In less than a year, we have met or far surpassed the early goals of the Ten-Year Plan. We're on a roll, but more needs to be done. I believe that we can put a roof over every head in Seattle and King County.”

According to *The First Bold Steps*, in 2005 and 2006:

- The Committee to End Homelessness in King County put in place a strong, collaborative governance structure, and Safe Harbors, a data information system to help guide program development and investments, was launched.
- 1,300 new housing units to house formerly homeless individuals and families were opened or funded, and hundreds of additional units are being planned.
- Millions of new dollars were dedicated to resolve homelessness thanks to substantial increases in the state Housing Trust Fund, passage of the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act by the state Legislature, passage of the Veterans and Human Services Levy by King County voters and commitments of new resources by King County, the City of Seattle, United Way of King County, King County Housing Authority and Seattle Housing Authority. In addition, suburban cities and partners such as A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH) have played an important role with their commitment and support to the 10-Year Plan.

“To have a community that attracts and retains qualified employees, and to ensure economic vitality, we must resolve homelessness long term,” said Dan Brettler, chairman and CEO of Car Toys and co-chair of the Committee to End Homelessness Governing Board. Brettler also chairs United Way of King County’s Out of the Rain homelessness initiative. “One year ago, this task seemed daunting, some said even impossible. Our progress report and the poll results tell us otherwise.”

“We are creating the housing and supportive services that individuals and families need to achieve a stronger and more independent future,” said Ron Sims, King County Executive and co-chair of the Committee to End Homelessness Governing Board. “As we celebrate our early achievements, we must keep the momentum. Thousands of people across King County are still sleeping in shelters, temporary housing or on the streets. We cannot let up until our work is done.”

The Committee to End Homelessness and United Way of King County will have a booth at Seattle’s Fremont Fair on June 17-18, under the banner: “United to End Homelessness.” Visitors will be encouraged to sign up as volunteers and add their pictures to the Wall of Commitment to End Homelessness.

The Committee to End Homelessness in King County is a first-of-its kind coalition created to implement and monitor the region’s Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. The committee is primarily funded by United Way of King County, King County and the City of Seattle. Coalition partners also include other governments, local housing authorities, social service providers and other nonprofits, for-profit businesses, faith-based groups, and homeless and formerly homeless people. The plan promotes long-term and sustainable solutions to homelessness including stronger regional coordination of existing resources and development of new ones. For more information, visit www.cehkc.org.